

Fanciful figures

This week we saw a couple of sets of fanciful figures intrude on the debate. There was Labour's 10,000 police at £30 a year salary, hastily adjusted to £8000 a year, still way below what we normally pay our officers. Then there was the FT's take on the EU bill for the UK leaving the Union, at Euro 100bn.

The first sets of numbers were mistakes, and have been adjusted upwards as much Labour spending will need to be to make it realistic. £300 m a year is nearer the mark.

The second story that the UK owes up to Euro 100 bn is just silly. There are no legal obligations to pay beyond the sums we owe for our regular contributions over the next twenty two months before we leave. If they want a political deal on money, then of course they would need to knock off our share of the assets. I don't see that is a sensible or attractive way to proceed for them. They should just accept the Treaty that allows for no special bill.

The UK should continue to be friendly, outward going and positive about it all. We should continue to stress the great deal we are proposing for our future relationship. Free access to our market for all their exporters. Guarantees for all their citizens living and working in the UK. Continued large UK contributions to the defence, security, research and culture of Europe.

Stable and strong leadership is needed by the UK, to be optimistic but to be firm in resisting silly proposals that have no basis in law or political reality.

The EU disobliging briefings sound as if they are coming from people who suddenly realise their negotiating strategy of pressurising a member state into seeing it their way is not going to work. The EU thought the UK would want to stay in the Single market Custom Union. They could then seek to charge us for that. It was always a silly assumption, as the UK clearly wants to make its own free trade agreements with the rest of the world which means leaving the Customs Union. The UK was also clear it wanted to stop paying the money. It is the Commission who are most worried about the loss of the UK's contributions, at its their budgets and salaries that will suffer.

The way countries pay to trade with other reluctant countries is via tariffs. If the EU wants to put tariffs up against us, it can only do so to a limited extent under WTO rules. It would be a lot cheaper than the bills we are hearing about. In return we can impose more tariffs on them given the nature and volume of their exports to us. That is why I have always thought it likely in the end they will want tariff free trade. It is, of course, always possible they wish to self harm. However, it seems it is more the EU Commission that favours a tough approach as the harm is to the member states, not to the Commission itself. The member states are more likely to wake up to the harm it could do their export companies and especially their farmers and want a more sensible approach.

Promoted by Fraser McFarland on behalf of John Redwood, both at 30 Rose Street Wokingham RG40 1XU

The General Election.

The 2017 Parliament needs to see through the twin tasks of economic recovery and the successful negotiation of a new relationship with the EU.

Both these mighty tasks were started before. The task of economic rescue began in 2010.

We have seen through the first long part of the recovery, cutting the deficit and creating conditions for many new jobs to be generated. Today many more people are in work, and more have better paid jobs. We now need to raise our sights, to work smarter so more people can be better paid. We need to continue the good progress to getting more people into work. Once in work we need to help them train, improve, and gain promotion. We also need to be encouraging of enterprise, making it easier for people to set up their own businesses, and to grow those businesses.

The task of leaving the EU whilst improving our relationship with Europe began last summer after the vote. We now need to bring people together to back a vision of what an independent UK looks like. It can be so much better. We want to be open to the world and a leader of freer world trade. We want to increase our collaborations on research, culture, investment and enterprise with the whole world, not turn our backs on European joint ventures. We do not wish to close our borders, but to welcome students, tourists, people of talent, executives of large global companies and those with the skills we need at home.

The overriding task is to get the law through to complete our exit from the EU, and to negotiate a friendly Agreement on our future trade and relations with the EU that helps them as well as us. The new Parliament will then need to move on to make those changes to our laws we need to make so that our newfound freedom leads to some improvement. The Conservatives have made clear we do not intend to remove any of the employment rights or environmental protections that have come from the EU, but to incorporate them in UK law. There they are safe, unless a party in the future with a majority wants to amend or change them having stated so in a Manifesto.

We do wish to plan for changes to the current EU laws over fishing and farming. We think we need a fishing policy that is kinder to both our fish and our fishermen than the present policy. We want an agriculture policy that helps UK farmers produce more of our food, and supports landscapes where the farmer has costs to maintain them.

I am conscious that people who voted Remain were worried about possible

economic damage. So far the UK economy has continued to grow, to generate more jobs, and to only suffer the same uptick in inflation that Germany and the USA have suffered, mainly owing to oil prices. I will work tirelessly in the new Parliament if elected to see through policies that put continued growth and prosperity first.

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Better facilities at Wokingham station?

I have received a follow up letter today from First Rail, who start the new South West train franchise in August. I held a meeting with them last month to discuss improvements for travellers using Wokingham Station.

They say they do wish to introduce a click and collect facility at the Station for people to pick up goods they have bought on line on their way home. This is subject to reaching commercial agreement on how to do it.

They also say they want to introduce automatic number plate recognition for car parking at the Station. This would enable travellers to register their Debit card for automatic payment. They will also allow on line purchasing of car park season tickets. The aim is to make it quicker and easier to park with these additional choices.

Manufacturing PMI speeds up

The worriers about UK prospects often like to highlight the opinion polls of economic facts, the PMI figures giving an indication of how orders and confidence is trending in business.

Today's figures show an acceleration in manufacturing orders and output prospects, with the Index surging to 57.4 where anything over 50 means growth. There is also a slowing of input price inflation. This is not surprising given the levelling off in oil prices and the fall in some other raw materials. China has also stopped raising her prices in recent week after a period of substantial rises in manufactured goods costs.

This is all positive for the second quarter output figures in due course.

An agricultural revolution?

One of the drivers of growth and prosperity in eighteenth century England was agricultural advance. Farmers threw capital and technology at the problem of farming. Larger farms were created. Threshing, hoeing and seed drilling were done by newly developed machines. Crop rotations and selective breeding led to big advances in agricultural output.

Today we stand on the threshold of another possible agrarian revolution. The coming of the intelligent tractor with wide arms for spraying, and capabilities for ploughing, preparing, seeding and tending the crop is transforming quality of output as well as changing the demand for labour. Drones offer less intrusive ways of watering and spraying selectively as problems and shortages are detected in parts of a field or crop. Raising animals is becoming more science based, with better information about their health and well being informing choices for their care.

The UK has a great opportunity to grow its agriculture as we come out of the CAP. The main parties are all ready to continue with subsidy. The government has promised to carry on with the subsidies farmers were expecting from Brussels this decade.

Some argue the main aim of subsidy should be to remunerate farmers for their role as landscape gardeners on a grand scale. Much of the EU system now is designed to reward environmental work, giving subsidy for keeping land fallow or for nurturing certain types of landscape or nature reserve on or near farmland. The Swiss system out of the EU is about keeping the unique Swiss mountain landscapes, as an adjunct to tourism and hospitality which feed off the views.

Some argue the main aim should be about food production. Farmers could be rewarded for cutting imports and producing more of the types of food we need and can grow at home. The EU system used to be more completely based on such an approach.. The policy was born of post war angst in memory of the dreadful shortages of food that occurred during and in the aftermath of the 2nd world war. Later the EU system evolved to take environmental considerations much more into account.

Do we think current EU policy is well judged? How do farmers want the UK government to develop its own agriculture policy, safe in the knowledge that there is no present threat to the subsidies farmers receive? There is a big opportunity to grow more at home for the home market, and to invest more in the new husbandry that will raise productivity.